

# Commentary: A lesson in acceptance: From the Grand Central to Pulse

The “interim” memorial to honor the victims and survivors of the Pulse nightclub massacre was unveiled Tuesday by the onePULSE Foundation. During a dedication ceremony, Pulse nightclub owner and foundation founder Barbara Poma thanked local companies that contributed to the project. She also praised the survivors, first-responders and family members of victims who helped guide its design.

By **Daniel L. Bray**  
Guest Columnist

MAY 11, 2018, 6:15 PM

**I**n 1977, my stepfather, Ken Bray, bought Orlando’s oldest hotel, the San Juan (built in 1880 in the Spanish-revival style), and renovated and renamed it “San Juan Grand Central.” He turned it into a gay hotel, with a beautiful disco in the basement, where some of the most famous singers of the era performed — **Donna Summer**; Grace Jones; Earth, Wind & Fire; Gloria Gaynor; Thelma Houston; and Wayne Newton. When “The Rocky Horror Picture Show” first toured the U.S., it, too, made a stop at the the famed “disco hotel,” at the corner of Orange Avenue and Central Boulevard.

As anyone today can imagine, opening a gay hotel in the heart of downtown Orlando in the late-’70s was shocking and unwelcome to most Orlandoans. The pastor of a major Baptist church sent my stepfather a pair of roller skates with an attached note, left at the hotel lobby’s reservation counter: “Let these expedite your way to Hell Ken Bray.”

When the hotel caught on fire, wide speculation spread that my stepfather was behind it, to benefit from insurance. Burning down a building he loved was the last thing he would do, as he thought of it as a safe haven for the gay community and their friends, not only to have fun but feel “normalized.” Officials close to the investigation had reason to believe that the fire was set by a handful of over-zealous religious people, to eradicate homosexuality and symbolize the establishment burning in hell. This was a tragedy on a number of levels, from people feeling outcast to losing one of Orlando’s most prized historic buildings.

Since I was a boy, I was bullied for being gay, as everyone knew of my stepfather’s gay establishments (bars and hotels). From day to day, I didn’t know what might happen to me, whether I would be ridiculed or physically assaulted in my neighborhood, at school or at church. There was no support system for people like me, because adult gay men and women mostly lived in the shadows, with no support system of their own. To put it mildly, my stomach was always “burning” out of fear of what would be said or done to me.

While I was living this nightmare as a child and teenager, I can’t imagine what it must have been like for the LGBT community to live under such a dark cloud, along with trying to deal with the AIDS crisis.

Fast-forward to 2016: the Pulse nightclub massacre. My partner, Shawn Rader, and I have lived in the same neighborhood, a 10-minute walk from Pulse, for over 20 years. To have something this tragic happen so close to our home was both chilling and heartbreaking. Yet for me, there was something cathartic that came out of the Pulse shootings. This time, I had a strong sense that the very community that used to be homophobic and anti-Hispanic was in a completely different place after what happened with Pulse.

After more than four decades of living in fear, I now felt accepted, not just by the political, law-enforcement and business sectors, but also the religious communities. The outpouring of support and standing up for others throughout Orlando impacted people all over the country and throughout the world. More than ever, I felt relieved, and thankful.

Today, when I see an Orlando police officer or Orange County sheriff’s deputy, it’s a different experience, because I feel genuinely respected, even cared about. The same is true with many religious institutions around the city. Many of the “old Orlandoans” are also more accepting and embracing, as opposed to simply tolerant.


The long-awaited process of creating an interim memorial at Pulse nightclub is here. This week, when I saw the metal fences taken down, and people quickly gathering around to see the new venue, my own healing further evolved in a way I didn’t expect. I quietly and slowly walked around the new curvilinear wall of photos, windowed-access to where the building had been breached, and somber plaque of the 49 people who died. In spending only an hour there, I left feeling happier and having a greater sense of wanting to love everyone more than I ever have before.

While I suspect that the city of Orlando, volunteers and survivors might see the interim memorial as a place to pay respects and acknowledge the victims and their families, more importantly they have helped Orlando evolve into a special place to the world, showing how we all should love and care for one another.

*Daniel L. Bray has a private interior design practice in Orlando. He and his partner, Shawn Rader, have lived downtown for more than 27 years.*

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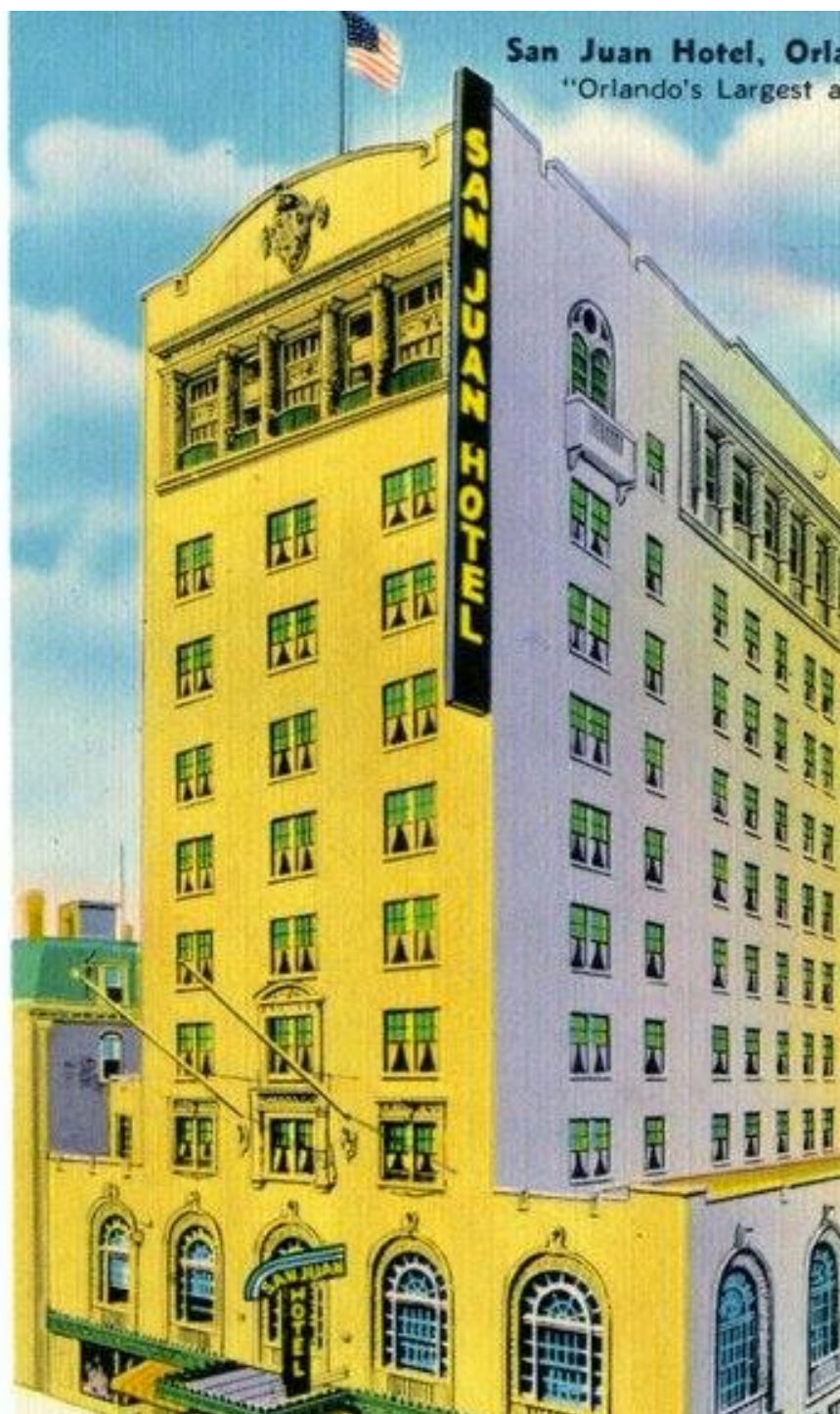
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## Officials Probing Fire At Gay Hotel

ORLANDO (AP) — Authorities, still trying to determine the cause of a fire that extensively damaged a controversial downtown landmark hotel, released a man who was held for nine hours on an arson charge.

The hotel caters primarily to homosexuals.

The unoccupied five-story wing of the Grand Central Hotel was destroyed Tuesday, along with several shops and small businesses on the first floor. The eight-story main structure sustained only water and smoke damage.

Firemen evacuated some 70 guests from the building, and none was injured.

Approximately 100 firemen fought the blaze for several hours before it was reported out, but even then small fires continued to pop up late into the day.

A former guest of the hotel was arrested and charged with setting the fire, but the charges were dropped nine hours later. The guest was William Carpenter, 18, who police said had been evicted after a fight on Monday. He was arrested while sitting on a park bench across the street from the burning hotel.

The former San Juan hotel stands on Orange Street, the main thoroughfare in downtown Orlando. It was sold, removed and last summer converted into what its owner at the time, Kenneth Bray, called a "gay hotel."

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## BUSINESS

# Parliament House owner says latest financial trouble will be over soon

By PAUL BRINKMANN  
DEC 19, 2016 AT 11:58 AM



Orlando's gay-themed resort Parliament House is facing a new foreclosure by the lender who bailed the resort out of a bankruptcy a year ago.

The owners of Orlando's gay-themed resort Parliament House are back in financial trouble, facing a new foreclosure by the lender who bailed the resort out of a

bankruptcy a year ago. But the owner says the latest trouble will be over soon and he will make the loan current.

Miami-based Lion Financial has filed a lawsuit to foreclose on its \$3.9 million mortgage for the main resort property, which is a little larger than 10 acres at 410 N. Orange Blossom Trail. The foreclosure was filed on Wednesday.

The resort, which is packed on some nights when it has events, celebrated its 40th anniversary in July 2015. But it has been in and out of financial trouble, through the Great Recession and afterward.

Granatstein said Monday he is working to get the Lion account paid up and believes the foreclosure will be dropped soon. Granatstein said a temporary cash-flow problem occurred when one of the resort's operating lines of credit, from a New York lender, was frozen suddenly.

He said the loan from Lion had a 12 percent interest rate. He said the shooting at Pulse nightclub, which was another Orlando gay bar, hurt his business too.

"We were on a rough road already, and then the Pulse shooting happened. We had a quarter of a million dollars in lost business this year and another \$150,000

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Granatstein previously blamed the recession and the collapse of several lenders for his financial troubles. He has also struggled with financing for the next-door Gardens timeshare development, which was an attempted expansion of the resort that opened just before the recession.

Parliament House debts got more complicated when one of the resort's lenders, USA Capital, went bankrupt in 2006, and its CEO Joe Milanowski was arrested and later convicted in a fraud of about \$86.9 million in scope.

In 2010, another investor, Ken Johnson, had attempted to foreclose on the resort, and a local judge had ordered a foreclosure auction in fall of 2015.



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But the new financing from Lion Financial came just in time, allowing Granatstein to keep control of the property. Granatstein also paid back taxes.

Lion owner Ron Simkins had confirmed the new loan.

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"I believe Parliament House is on the path to financial discipline and financial success, by getting past the bankruptcy and the trouble they had with previous lenders," Simkins said in November 2015.

Simkins' company has also invested in other Orlando hotels through the years, but he said the new loan for Parliament House was "based mostly on the value of the real estate and the business."



Granatstein has big plans for Parliament House. It recently joined a worldwide timeshare network, RCI, one of few gay resorts in the network. Granatstein was also hoping that gay tourism and gay marriage would boost business.

***Contact me with a news tip at [pbrinkmann@orlandosentinel.com](mailto:pbrinkmann@orlandosentinel.com) or 407-420-5660; Twitter is @PaulBrinkmann***

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## BUSINESS

# Parliament House owner says business 'not going anywhere' after foreclosure sale

By AUSTIN FULLER  
ORLANDO SENTINEL | FEB 28, 2020



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The sale of the property, 410 N. Orange Blossom Trail, too  
December. (Ricardo Ramirez Buxeda / Orlando Sentinel file)

Orlando's LGBTQ landmark Parliament House resort has been sold as part of a foreclosure case, records show, but the owner of the business said it will remain open.

The sale of the property, 410 N. Orange Blossom Trail, took place this week after a judgment of foreclosure in December, records show.

"We've been here for 44 years," Parliament House owner Don Granatstein said by phone. "We're not going anywhere."

He said the new owner will be the landlord.

Lion Financial, LLC, the plaintiff in the foreclosure case against Parliament Partners, Inc. and a number of other defendants, was due more than \$4.7 million in unpaid principal, interest and late fees, the judgment states.

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On Tuesday, the property was offered for sale to the highest and best cash bidder. The property was sold to Lion Financial, LLC with a bid of \$300,100.

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Friday.

The Parliament House's owners have **faced financial trouble during the past decade**, including **bankruptcy**.

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Austin Fuller



Austin Fuller is a business reporter at the Orlando Sentinel covering retail, restaurants and technology. A lifelong resident of Central Florida, he graduated from Stetson University in DeLand and previously worked for The Daytona Beach News-Journal.

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# Orlando's Parliament House resort announces closure set for Nov. 2

By FOX 35 News Staff | Published October 28 | Updated October 29 | Orlando | FOX 35 Orlando

**LAKE MARY, Fla.** - The Parliament House resort, a landmark for Orlando's LGBTQ community for nearly five decades, announced its closure on its social media on Wednesday.

"For over 45 years, The Parliament House has called Orange Blossom Trail our home. We have to announce that our home at its current location will be closing Monday, November 2, 2020. We put up a good fight over the last 11 months to secure financing and renovate our existing property. Unfortunately, that fight ended today with no deal. Our 'Last Dance' at 410 N. Orange Blossom Trail will be this Sunday, November 1, 2020," read part of a [post on Facebook](#).

The establishment first opened to the public in 1962 as the Parliament House Motor Inn, one of eight hotels in a chain. After declining occupancy, due to competition from nearby Walt Disney World which opened about a decade later, the hotel was on the brink of bankruptcy when it changed ownership.

Michael Hodge founded The Parliament House as an all-gay resort in 1975, according to the [Parliament House website](#), and after he died in 1992, the club then was run by his brothers and sisters. It was purchased by Don Granatstein and Susan Unger in the late 1990s and received an extensive renovation.

[A video was created for the 40th Anniversary of the Parliament House](#) including interviews with former employees and customers.

The property, which includes a complex comprised of over 100 hotel rooms, a restaurant, a showroom for live entertainment, a dance club, and adjacent lounges, sold earlier this year as part of a foreclosure case, the [Orlando Sentinel reported in February](#).

"It has never been about the building. It's about the people," read the Facebook post, indicating that the resort/club could be searching for another location.

"In the coming weeks, we'll reveal our plans for the immediate future. Although we are sad for the loss, we are even more excited for our future! Once you hear what we have planned, we think you'll be just as excited. Thanks for your support for the last 45 years. This is by no means goodbye. We promise to keep you updated about our grand re-opening."

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